

# Eat Smart Be Smart

## WHAT TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT NUTRITION

*Adapted from information provided by the Western Dairy Association*

- **Children's current nutrition practices are not making the grade.**
  - 40 percent of total calories are coming from added fat and sugar.
  - Only 2 percent of children are meeting the recommended number of servings from the Food Pyramid.
  - The number of overweight American children has more than tripled in the past 30 years.
  - Overfed, yet undernourished, many children's diets are deficient in iron, zinc and calcium.
  - Eating disorders among children are on the rise.
- **Choose MyPlate has replaced the Food Pyramid - [www.ChooseMyPlate.gov](http://www.ChooseMyPlate.gov)**

This new plate graphic follows the 2010 Dietary Guidelines to encourage balancing calories by enjoying a variety of foods but eating less and avoiding oversized portions. Make half of your plate fruits and vegetables, half of grains whole grains, and drinking 1% or fat-free milk.
- **School wellness policies are a requirement and/or recommended for all schools.**

As of July 2004, Congress mandated that all school districts (with USDA school nutrition programs) adopt a school wellness policy that addresses nutrition standards for foods sold during the school day, nutrition education, and physical activity for students. Take steps to implement the school wellness policy by setting up a healthy classroom.
- **Set a healthy example and put wellness into action.**

Children learn by example and you can send a powerful health message to children by your food and physical activity habits during the day. Set a good example. For example, eat breakfast with the students, drink water throughout the day and enjoy fruits and vegetables at snack time.
- **Snacks can be an important part of children's diets.**

For children, snacks (if chosen wisely) can help provide the calories and nutrients, such as calcium and iron, which children need for growth, development and activity. Eaten one or two hours before meals, snacks won't spoil appetites. However, children may need help in choosing snacks. Nationwide studies show that children often eat high-calorie, low-nutrient snacks. Encourage fruits, vegetables, high fiber low fat grains, low fat cheese or lean proteins.
- **Most foods can be part of a healthy diet.**

Most nutrition experts agree there are no "good" or "bad" foods, just good and bad diets. Any food, in moderation, can fit in a nutritious diet. However, having healthy food choices available and accessible to children is an important step in helping them practice healthy eating behaviors.
- **Children may need many exposures to a "new" food before they feel comfortable trying it.**

Many children are not adventurous eaters. But you can help them explore new foods by having occasional "tasting" parties. To make your tasting events successful:

  - Let your students help prepare foods. The more they help, the more likely they'll taste.
  - Serve foods with eye appeal. Include a variety of colors, textures and smells.
  - Make serving sizes appropriate for the children.
  - Respect their food preferences and avoid forcing a child to taste.
  - Offer something familiar with something unfamiliar.
  - Avoid asking if a food tastes good. Instead discuss its shape, texture, color, smell, taste and even sound.

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- **Nutrition messages are more successfully received when they are presented in a positive manner. Make nutrition education fun!**

Studies have shown that people are much more likely to make positive behavior changes when the change is presented in a positive light. There are many positives associated with eating in a healthy manner - share this excitement with your students.

- **Provide opportunities for children to "practice" the healthy behaviors they learn about in class.**

Support the nutrition education messages with an environment which allows the students the opportunity to practice healthy behaviors. Some suggestions are: providing healthy choices in the cafeteria, student stores and vending machines; limit low-nutrient rich, high -calorie foods (pop, candy, chips) in classroom parties; providing adequate time for students to eat school meals.

- **Hungry children can't concentrate. Encourage students to eat balanced meals.**

Children who eat breakfast perform better (higher test scores, less discipline problems) in school as they have more energy, greater concentration and better muscle coordination in the morning. To make sure students are ready to learn, more and more schools are starting or expanding their breakfast program.

Balanced meals are ones with at least three to four food groups represented. School lunch meals often provide a serving from all five food groups. Kids need a balanced lunch to perform at their best in the afternoon.

- **Teach kids to eat when hungry and stop when full - don't use food for the basis of a student reward system.**

In today's world of super-sized portions, numerous food advertisements and many occasions to eat, children need to learn to eat when they are physically hungry and stop when they are full. Food shouldn't be used as a reward for children as it sends the message that they should eat because they earned a good grade or behaved and encourages emotional eating.

- **Regular physical activity is an essential piece of the healthy living puzzle.**

Kids need to be active throughout the day to stay well and ready to learn. Incorporate short physical activity or brain breaks during the school day.

- **Diets don't work and aren't recommended for kids or adults.**

Kids need to eat for growth, development and to meet their energy needs related to their physical activity levels. Focus on teaching kids to enjoy a variety of healthful foods. Refer children to the school nurse or community health professionals for professional guidance.

*Katie Bark, RD, Team Nutrition Program at Montana State University  
(406) 994-5641 or e-mail [kbark@mt.gov](mailto:kbark@mt.gov). For nutrition education resources go to  
<http://opi.mt.gov/MTeamNutrition>*

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